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THE MOST EMPIRICAL OF THE PROFESSIONS

The magic word of our day is the word science. Its power to dominate the imagination of men, and through it their conduct, is not less great and marvelous than that which, in the *Arabian Nights* and other wondrous tales of the past, was attributed to the devotees of the black art.

The magician of ancient days was compelled to demonstrate his power by working some astonishing transformation in a portion or a feature of the natural world ; otherwise, the public contemptuously dismissed him from all serious consideration as a mere impostor. It availed him nothing to point out that the transformation he had failed to accomplish by his passes and his muttered formulas was among the commonest known to magic, and had frequently and notoriously been achieved in a neighboring district. But oddly enough, the populace of our day, which regards itself as hard-headed and skeptical, does not demand from its magicians the achievement in its presence of any particular results. Solemn and repeated assurance on the part of the practitioner that he is of the great family of science overawes it, and though it may now and then have frantic fits of skepticism, it knows very well that in the long run every practitioner, by reason of his very boldness in claiming membership in that family, gets his claim allowed, and all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining.

The catholicity of science and its practitioners is indeed great, and perhaps admirable. Setting as its noble aspiration the ascertainment of the truth about all that is, and the subjection

of all knowledge to the service of man, science can of course not allow itself to be either squeamish or snobbish, but must concern itself equally with what are by conventional standards reckoned the lofty and the lowly, and must press into its service the very sons and daughters of fraud, imposture, and quackery. Never before these latest days, perhaps, has science formally and frankly recognized this obligation of universal catholicity, as it is now doing through the medium of some of its most famous spokesmen.

Science of necessity implies sciences ; and these latter are of many kinds, and represent many grades of that singular compound whose constituents are certitude and dubiety. Every need and interest of man, æsthetic or practical, imaginary or real, has now its science. Of that astonishing and varied family none, surely, is more interesting than that youngish miss who, unlike most of her sisters, answers to no august Greek name, fit, and perhaps calculated, to inspire wonder and terror in the minds of generations of school children, but has been compelled to make her way into circles of scientific respectability handicapped by the homely and commonplace Latin name of the Science of Education.

It is impossible to deny that there is a science of education. The proof that there is, forces itself upon our attention in a hundred ways. It stares at us in the bulletins in which the publishers announce the new books of the season. It is implied or, sometimes, vehemently affirmed, in the thousands of speeches and addresses made annually by and for teachers. It is taken for granted in the catalogues of all the colleges and universities —where it used to be called pedagogy, but is so no longer, that term, apparently, having suggested too strongly the old-fashioned schoolmaster visiting corporal chastisement upon a cringing urchin. Supreme proof of all, its existence is not questioned even by the magazine writers, who know so much more than all about everything that is and is not in the world to-day.

The ancients seemed not to have been able to agree very well as to just how a man ought to be educated ; and they therefore abstained from laying the foundations of our science. During the Middle Ages men muddled along, doing in school and univer-

sity the thing which Authority said should be done, some man, now and then, in the case of an individual absurdity, protesting, but with no long effectiveness, that the particular practice did not seem altogether wise. No science of education yet. None, either, in the stormy centuries that followed, during which Catholic and Protestant battled for the supremacy of Europe and the world's future. None, still, in the seventeenth century and the eighteenth, when, though discontent grew at times vociferous, men were yet, on the whole, content to jog along as of old. But at last, in that great nineteenth century, Science, flushed with some supreme victories over age-long enemies, annexed to her empire the remaining kingdoms of human interest and endeavor. Her family grew rapidly as the result of the new prosperity that followed; and presently, among other little sciences whose birth the clerk of the century had the pleasure of recording, we find the name of the little Science of Education. The infant had waited so long to be born that, as is the odd way of some infants, it very early began to speak the same language as the most venerable of its sisters, and, in general, to conduct itself with a self-assured air of wisdom that may have vexed some of these sisters a little, and has, at any rate, seemed at times rather ludicrous to people who are not members of the family. Some of these outsiders, indeed, have seriously wondered whether the child can hope to grow to maturity. Great precocity, as we all know, is invariably the subject of these gloomy fears in the minds of friends of the family.

It is always more interesting, and usually more profitable, for us to give our attention to the living agent and his activities, than it is to bestow it on the abstract idea. If we were to try to pursue further the path of metaphor here, in an attempt to accompany the precocious young Miss Science of Education as she goes about her daily duties, we should speedily find ourselves lost in a jungle. Let us therefore transfer our attention from the science to the scientist and the occupation which, as a practical man, he professes.

With the possible exception of actresses, the figure most constantly to-day in the public eye, as the fifteen-cent magazines say, is that eminent man of science, the educator. The edu-

cator is generally the president of a university, of a college, or of a normal school, though sometimes he is merely a professor in one of these institutions. In some circles, however, the boundaries of the science are more liberally drawn, and the term educator is made to include, and even, *par excellence*, to suggest, the gentleman or the lady who presides over the country school. Some time ago, professional duty sent me to a teachers' meeting in a small town in an agricultural state. The hour for the opening came and passed, but the meeting remained still unopened. I presently gathered from remarks I caught that we were waiting for the arrival of several persons from far out in the country, who would be late because of the bad condition of the roads. In particular, I learned, proceedings could not begin until the arrival of the educator who was teaching in district number sixty-two, Professor "Cad" Young. Professor "Cad" was to read one of the most important papers on the programme, his subject being "The Science of Psychology, and its Bearing on the Science of Education." From all over the county, I gathered, educators had come, in spite of the bad condition of the roads, eager to get the views of Professor "Cad" on this important topic; views which it was expected would be somewhat daring. He was the leading specialist of the county in this field, it appeared, and his opinions would therefore be heard with great respect by his brother and sister educators.

Educators of every grade, in truth, have caught the modern cant of specialism; but it is only educators of the loftiest grades—alas that in the sacred domain of science itself we should have to recognize these childish distinctions of rank!—it is only university presidents who are willing to admit that they are specialists in all things, from football to the Trinity, and for the enlightenment of the public allow themselves to be interviewed on any subject whatever. "I am a man, and to myself hold alien nothing human," was said long ago, with an extravagance of hyperbole pardonable, perhaps, in mere literature, from which we do not exact any severe veracity. "I am an educator, and to myself hold alien no sort of knowledge or wisdom that anybody can demand of me," is the formulation, in terms of scientific precision, of the notion which our clear-visioned

leaders in the science of education see must be the guiding one in their field. If educators of the humbler grade have not yet caught that point of view, they may be trusted to do so in no long time. All things come from above, we must remember. Not even democracy has been able to change that.

Troublesome questions, however, suggest themselves to one who observes the workings of a profession from the outside. Let us suppose that point of view to be ours in this case, and from it for a little while, let us contemplate the workings of the profession of education. And first let us ask ourselves whether the profession as practised to-day affords any clear indication that the practitioners know what they are about. Now, we must not be unfair to educators, and exact from them a clearness of vision which we do not find in the followers of any other of the professions, and which is perhaps not possible to human eye. It may even be that, from the necessities of the case, educators cannot justly be expected to know what they are about, as definitely as those who follow the other professions. Let us, at any rate, see what the facts are.

Now, there is no denying that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with all the professions, alike on the part of those who practise them and on the part of the public practised upon. We are in truth a grumbling age. We grumble at ourselves and at our own occupations, we grumble at everybody else and his occupation. We grumble, even, at the universe in general and all its arrangements; at the same time, however, on all public occasions, when it seems to be necessary to announce a general attitude to life and the world, giving pious expression, in phraseology now somewhat shop-worn, to that odd negation of all ideas which in the pseudo-philosophical jargon of the day is called optimism. Probably this universal grumbling is only an expression of that divine discontent that is the root of all progress. Take the profession of law, for example. The public growls at it; the practising lawyer growls at it when he meets his brother lawyer at the annual meeting of the bar association; the judge, in language dignified, perhaps, but severe, growls most of all, because he, more often than anybody else, sees the ends of justice defeated in the litigation that comes before him

as he sits in seeming power but real helplessness on his judicial bench. But in spite of all the growling, public, lawyer, and judge would probably agree that justice is now dealt out with a more nearly even hand to all alike than at any other period in the history of the world, and that cases in which cruel injustice is done under the forms of law, once so common as hardly to excite mild surprise even in the victim, are now so unusual as to attract wide attention when they do occur, and arouse a public indignation that is usually effective in compelling speedy redress, where redress is possible. Certainly, too, the profession of the law knows pretty definitely what its business is: to enable every man to get his dues, so far as it is possible for organized society to enable him to do that, and to prevent him from getting more than his dues, again so far as it is within the power of organized society so to prevent him. It may be argued, indeed, that the question as to what are his dues is one about which there is so little agreement that the end which the law sets for itself cannot, after all, rightly be said to be a very definite one. But this is really to argue very unfairly. Undoubtedly there is some disagreement among men here, and there probably always will be some; but the points of agreement are vastly more numerous, as well as, practically, vastly more important. It is therefore not extravagant to say that lawyers and judges have a pretty definite idea as to what it is their business to be about; and when, as occasionally happens, they show any disposition to forget this, the public is not backward, or overawed by the traditional majesty of the law, but knows how, through many agencies, to give them vigorous and insistent reminders to bring back their errant feet to tolerable ways.

The physician, too, knows very definitely what he must be about. He must cure our diseased bodies, he must make whole and sound again our wounded members. He has other and related functions, some of them, perhaps, not as yet conceived by either himself or the public with perfect definiteness; but these are the chief offices of his profession, and if he performs them with intelligence and faithfulness, the community will respect him and be grateful to him as the good physician, the most useful of human beings, almost regardless of any defects in

his manners or his temper, or any lapses in his conduct that do not seem likely to interfere with the performance of his duty as a healer of our broken and neglected bodies. There can be no difference of opinion as to what a well body is. Rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, practical man and idealist, agree easily on that matter. Nor is any controversy possible as to whether a sound arm is better than a broken one. True, there may be difference of opinion in the profession as to the best means of attaining the desired cure in a given case. The human body is an exceedingly complicated machine, and, obviously enough, the laws of its perfect working under all sorts of conditions, normal and varyingly abnormal, are by no means completely understood by even the wisest of physicians. But if we consider the matter fairly, we must admit that even as regards methods of procedure there is far more of agreement than of disagreement among competent and alert physicians who are at some pains to keep themselves abreast of their profession. It is methods of procedure, however, which constitute the only possible subject of disagreement among physicians, never the end to be attained, which, as they universally allow, is the restoration of the sick body as nearly as possible to its normal condition—that of a body whose parts function harmoniously and without pain.

Even the clergyman knows fairly well what he is about. It must be admitted, indeed, that the case of the clergyman is not quite so simple as that of the lawyer and the physician. As a matter of fact, we must allow that there is not agreement among all respectable people to-day as to the validity of the end which he sets himself. It is even likely that clergymen themselves could not agree to-day in their statement of that end. A hundred and fifty years ago they would easily have done so. Fifty years later there would have been among them a few dissenters. Fifty years later still, the dissenters would have been rather more numerous, but would have been inconsiderable both in numbers and as regards wide and immediate influence. Even yet the great majority of clergymen could probably be brought into agreement on a formula describing the definite practical end at which their professional labors are aimed—the salvation of the individual souls which they believe to be possessed by

those to whom they minister. The words, "could probably be brought into agreement," have been used advisedly here; for there are undoubtedly many clergymen to-day who would at first recoil from the almost brutal practicality of the formula mentioned, but who in the last analysis would have to admit that it must be just, if their profession is to maintain its claim to support from practical people. Certainly, not even the most heretical clergyman, not even the clergyman who most recoils from what he deems the egoism and vulgarity of the end which popular religion admits itself to be seeking, will ever listen with anything but deep satisfaction and approval when he hears drawn the classic analogy between himself and the physician, as the healers, respectively, of the souls and bodies of men. He therefore believes himself to have a definite and vital social office to perform; and in so far as it continues to support him at considerable cost to itself in time, energy, and money, the public undoubtedly agrees with him.

While, therefore, one must admit that in each of the great professions of law, medicine, and religion—one does not quite like the phrase, profession of religion, perhaps, but there is no better for the purpose, inasmuch as the only possible substitute, profession of theology, is not really possible, since it does not at all describe what is meant—while in each of these professions, dealing as each does with that complicated being, man, there is an element of empiricism, of uncertainty, there is nevertheless a fundamental basis of certainty. What, on the other hand, is the state of affairs with which the profession of education is concerned? Is there, amid much that is shifting and uncertain, an agreement on things fundamental and definite, which keeps our faces always in the right direction, however slow our progress may at times seem?

To ask this question is almost to answer it. In education there can hardly be said to be agreement about anything, either fundamental or incidental. To be sure, all would probably admit that the business of education is to educate; but that, of course, really takes us nowhere. The ideal which the lawyer sets for his profession is that it shall enable all to secure the same justice. The field of the physician and the clergyman,

respectively, is equally wide: all men who need it, that is, all men at some time, are to be healed, physically and spiritually. But are all men to be educated? Perhaps; but there would be universal agreement on this point only if we understand the term 'education' in a sense so vague and general that we may allow ourselves to recognize as proper subjects of the educational process, not men alone, but domestic animals as well. Once, indeed, in days before the science and the profession of education had attained recognition, there was pretty generally accepted what amounted almost, if not quite, to a guiding principle in this matter: each human being was to receive the education which would fit him to perform well that function in the social economy, noble or ignoble, which his father before him had performed. But democracy and universal social aspiration have put an end to that. Not all the eloquence of all the Carlyles and the Ruskins can rehabilitate that principle and give it credit in the world again. We may approve or disapprove, as we choose or can; but the change has come, and to argue for the old notion is to speak on behalf of something that is as irrevocably gone as feudalism or the Egypt of the Ptolemies. The future may or may not belong to that very different way of thinking that we call socialism; but there is at any rate some ground for hoping that a part at least of the mission which the poet-socialist has of the future of the human race may one day be realized. If all goes well, a day should at last come when man's economic life shall not overshadow all his other life, a day when no man shall be primarily an economic agent, a day when every man shall be that incidentally, perhaps, but no more than incidentally.

When that day comes, there may again be a simple if not perfectly definite principle behind all our education, giving some measure of consistency, some approach to form, to all of our educational practices and processes. Men may then be educated primarily as men, not as economic agents. But to-day we are "wandering between two worlds," having just at this moment, it must be admitted, a tendency to go backward historically and make economic considerations the basis of our education. This tendency, however, is checked by numerous other tendencies, so that the total effect is that of great con-

fusion, amounting almost to absolute anarchy. It is in our colleges, perhaps, that this confusion shows itself in the most pronounced form. Originally ecclesiastic institutions, and therefore somewhat narrowly professional, colleges were gradually transformed into training schools, so to speak, of aristocracy, to which young men of good birth were sent in order that they might by association with one another become deeply imbued with the traditional ideals of their class, and by mildly enforced contact with books and scholars, get that veneer of culture which came to be recognized as a chief mark of a gentleman. Swept along by our dominant but by no means perfectly clear-headed and universally triumphant democracy, our colleges, to which young men and women of every social class now resort in increasing numbers, attempt to satisfy the needs and aspirations of these young people by giving them an education compounded in varying proportions of two elements, the practical and the æsthetic, these elements suggesting ideals which in the past shaped two very different types of education,—that received by the villain, and that given to the gentleman. We may pretend as much as we like that these two elements are not in conflict with one another, and that they may be made to harmonize perfectly. The truth is they do not harmonize, and they cannot be made to do so until a social system shall arise under which the practical will not of necessity be essentially synonymous with the self-regarding, and under which it will not be necessary for the average human being to give nine-tenths of his time and energy to satisfying economic demands upon him and preserving his mere physical existence. The education given by colleges in all democratic countries, therefore, is likely to go on attempting to be pronouncedly practical, in the very narrowest sense of that term, for an indefinite length of time; and because of the universal social aspiration of the people in all truly democratic countries, it will go on trying to satisfy the other ideal also. The result must of necessity be a continuation of that confusion as regards purposes and methods which is now being so much remarked upon in connection with our American colleges, but which, for reasons wider than those that have just been suggested, is by no means confined to them.

John Stuart Mill pointed out, in his "System of Logic," that the most complex and difficult of the sciences are those which deal with man, the reason being that in these sciences every fact is the result of an almost infinite variety of causes which it is usually impossible completely to disentangle, and that in them, from the nature of their subject-matter, the most rigorous methods of experimentation cannot be employed. If this be true even of the science of medicine, which deals with a single and fairly well-defined part of human nature, it is still more obviously true of the science of education, which, as we now conceive it, is concerned with the whole of that nature. Individual human nature is almost infinitely various. If there are great and striking ways in which all men are essentially alike, there are also very numerous points of difference, some of them deeply hidden, beyond the ken of any teacher, but operating with fatal effectiveness to nullify his teaching, in many directions, however enlightened and faithful that teaching may be. Every pupil who goes into a schoolroom is inevitably a new combination of powers, impulses, and limitations. Two pupils may seem so much alike that for the life of him the teacher cannot see why the methods that succeed perfectly with one should fail completely with the other. But the trouble is that in that exceedingly complex thing, human character, a peculiarity invisible to the most searching and sympathetic eye may, under certain favoring conditions, become an essential peculiarity, and determine the direction in which the character shall develop or refuse to develop. A prejudice taken against the teacher on the first day of school, by reason of some chance remark of his, or some little mannerism for which the pupil has an eccentric repulsion, may not only spoil the year's work for that pupil, but may result in bringing his school education to an untimely end, with calamitous consequences upon all his after-life. What clear-headed teacher, again, but has seen the methods that have succeeded perfectly with one class fail as completely with another?

It is clear, therefore, that from the nature of the material with which it deals, teaching must involve a continual succession of experiments; the great majority of the experiments, however,

leading to no general results, since they represent conditions which do not repeat themselves, or repeat themselves with such varying attendant circumstances as to make all deductions from them unsafe. When to this consideration we add the further one, already glanced at, that ideas as to the proper content of education vary from age to age, as social ideals and the general character of civilization vary; and when in addition to all these sources of uncertainty and difficulty, we remember that there can never in any age be complete agreement as to what are the things best worth developing in human natures, an irreducible difference of opinion, here, rooting itself in ultimate differences in the temperaments and aspirations of men, we may be able to see not only that teaching is the most empirical, and therefore the most difficult of all the professions, but that in the very nature of things it must always remain such, and that the tendency to vagaries and faddishness, more marked in this profession, perhaps, than in any other, is not to be attributed, wholly, at least, to the inferior character of those who follow that profession.

Faddish, beyond all question, our education is, to a degree that is irritating and astonishing to the average person outside of the profession. The ordinary citizen, if by any chance he attends a meeting of teachers and hears them cry up the vast superiority of present-day methods of teaching, let us say, the art of reading, to very young children, is apt to be simply astonished at what seems to him the extravagance of the claims made for these methods, and at the ignorance their champions show regarding what was accomplished in this direction when he was a boy, by a teacher who cannot have been aware that he had any method at all, and with no tool except the Elementary Spelling Book; and especially is the citizen astounded if his own children have under these vaunted modern methods learned to read only after going through a process of slow agony, and having a great deal of help from their mother at home. He is especially surprised when he turns his attention to the course of events in the university world. When a university inaugurates a new president, the citizen observes that the first thing he does is to announce a policy chiefly designed to upset the work

of his predecessor ; or if circumstances make that impossible, one that will have a plausible appearance of doing so. In the speeches that constitute the chief feature of the inaugural ceremonies, he notes with amazement that two contradictory things are done, and that each is received with that decorous but universal applause appropriate to such respectable yet joyous occasions : he hears the retiring president, the responsible author of the vicious past, glorified for his great services to the cause of education ; and then he hears the same acclamations greet all references to the new president, whose avowed purpose it is to cancel the work of his predecessor at the earliest possible date. It is not surprising if, when the speeches are ended, our citizen leaves the hall in a state of some confusion, and wondering whether education is not rather a mystery than a science.

Let us not, however, be very severe on the teacher if he, too, like all the rest of the world, is enamored of new things, and sometimes mistakes mere change for revolutionary progress. It is doubtful, it is true, if the science of education, in our America of the twentieth Christian century, has any clearer conception of the goal at which it is aiming than that which guided the teachers of the youth of Greece, four centuries before Christ, or their contemporaries, the old men of the Indian tribes which may then have been wandering on the banks of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi. It is doubtful if the goal is more often reached now, by the modern educator with all his elaborate notions about the mind of the child, his teachers' meetings, his educational journals, and dear knows what not, than it was by those ancient pedagogues and wise men of the tribe. Certainly, the advantage is on the side of the ancients, if we may accept as evidence regarding the achievements of our modern educators some of the papers read by school superintendents and principals before educational associations, or the information and the views which university presidents and professors give us in academic addresses and magazine articles. The case is hardly better if we consider the apparently more impartial evidence afforded by the newspaper press, which, except in its most resolutely optimistic mood, has little of commendation to bestow upon the education of the day ; the reiterated and enthusiastic attention given by

our periodicals to the great universities being little more than an expression of admiration for their bigness and wealth, and, perhaps, for their success in the conspicuous performance of tasks that are primarily material. But hope springs eternal in the teacher's breast. He believes in himself, even if nobody else does, and is a man of confident to-morrows. To be sure, he has made many mistakes, and knows it, and has seen his fellow-teachers make many more. But he has what is, perhaps, in the long run, the happy capacity for believing that there is a right way, and that he and his brethren have either found it or are very near to finding it. He lives in a world where in most lines there is conspicuous and undeniable progress. It is perhaps well that he can keep himself heartened up to the performance of his indispensable but difficult and often discouraging task by the belief that his profession shares the universal character. But the great public whom he attempts to serve needs sometimes to be reminded that his task is a difficult one, and that his occasional vagaries are not ordinarily due altogether to his personal eccentricity. They are, rather, chiefly due to the necessity which he far more than any other man is under, of continually re-shaping his practices, to bring them into some sort of harmony with ideals of life and a general social level never long the same, but almost constantly varying under the influence of changes taking place in every other department of human activity. It may even be both wise and kind to warn the teacher himself now and then that he must not demand impossible things of himself, that he is only preparing for himself deep disappointment if he looks for linear progress in his science, or hopes ever to experience that sense of definite and measurable tasks certainly accomplished in which men laboring in other fields find the most satisfactory part of their reward. The teacher must forever be farther from perfection, from the realization of his dearest dreams, than any other man. It is "laid in the unalterable constitution of things" that it should be so. Are not the dearest dreams always found to be somewhat vague when we confront them in the cold sober light of day? But we are never sorry to have dreamed them.

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